

[68 cont.]

757 referred, are what contain the curative properties because of their
751 magic force. These medicines are applied in the following
278 manner: The infusion of herbs with rum and the drops "whis-
643 pered over" are added to previously boiled water, and the child
is bathed at birth with this mixture. When the mother feels the
pains of approaching childbirth, she also takes a glass of this
mixture and repeats this a few moments after the child is born,
which helps her to get rid of the placenta.

* * *

75 Thus far the notes that we have concerning the magico-
preventative or curative medical methods of the Indians of La
Guajira [sic]. These show first, how medicine, like birth,
sickness, and death, is subject to a series of cultural patterns,
the result of the individual's relations, magic or spiritualistic
(so far as the spirit of the dead is concerned), with his environ-
ment. The latter are to be understood in their widest meaning,
774 since as Doctor W. Born says:

"Primitive man's intellectual world is not really limited to sorcery since there are too many enigmas facing young humanity such as birth and death, dreams and sickness. To explain these, primitive man appeals to various supernatural forces. From experiences in the world of dreams, he derived the belief in a soul as a clear explanation of the consciousness of "ego," which is opposed to the destiny of death. The power of the soul to free itself from its body (as dreams seemed to indicate) accepted, it was natural that he should accept the possibility of the existence of independent and active souls in nature. This state renders feasible not only a polydemonism but also the notion of a material soul. Polydemonism admits that a demon, a sort of soul, lives in everything in nature, while the substance of the soul is an invisible energy which emanates from objects. As the substance

[68 cont.]

774 of the soul is uniform, so also the effects of all things are magically related to one another." (46)

46. Born. Fetiché, Amuleto,
Talisman [Fetish, Amulet,
Talisman], p. 3.

764 This polydemonism of which Dr. Born writes, or spiritism as we have called it, can be seen more clearly in the life of the Guajiro communities in the chapter which deals with the aspect of funerals. All the ceremonial relating to the dead is filled with this belief [69] in the universal soul and in the survival of a personal soul after death.

755 In the chapter we are dealing with we see it also clearly established, especially in the curative methods followed by the shaman, or medicine man, who seeks the assistance of his protector spirit or spirits to find out the kind of illness the sick man is suffering from and the manner of eradicating it from his body, as well as in certain aspects of household remedies consisting of preventative methods. In no way different are the 764 taboo prohibitions related to the dead, the burials and exhumations 783 in general, animals sacrificed in funeral ceremonial, and 784 persons who have been in contact, directly or indirectly, with the dead by assisting in the burial or exhumation of human remains, in digging graves, in imprudently gazing on the placing of a burial in the grave, etc., all of which contaminate with the essence of the dead, who by his very nature, by the act of having passed to a higher life situated on a plane of superior potentialities to that which he has left, is converted into something dangerous, sacred or impure, as the case may be, and for this reason contaminating.

751 This contaminating action of the dead also appears in the 775 aspect of medicine since they endeavor to avoid possible harm to children before birth and therefore to pregnant women or those in actual childbirth, because, as we have already seen these are the most likely victims of the malevolent action of spirits. Children especially receive such influences through their parents when they are in the mother's womb and have such poor means of self-defense.

[77 cont.]

762 inflicted on the objects which were the principal active agents
768 in carrying out his fatal determination. As the form of suicide
672 that is practiced in La Guajira is almost exclusively that of
hanging, they proceed to burn the branch on which the individ-
ual hanged himself and the rope which he used, because, they
say, these were the direct causes of his death.

682 With respect to the punishment carried out on the objects
672 (inanimate to us) which served for the carrying out of suicide,
several suggestions may be made. In one case, the "compensa-
tion payment for blood" may be recalled, the established custom-
ary law of this community by means of which whatever spilling
of blood that may be caused in any person, voluntary or in-
voluntary, directly or indirectly, has to be paid for in accord-
[692] ance with a valuation decreed by the so-called "arbitrators,"
or "palabras," who are nothing more than intermediaries named
by the family groups affected to settle the affair peacefully.

This payment is considerable when the blood spilling ends in the
victim's death. Should the murderer refuse to pay the sum ar-
682 ranged for (whether in livestock, necklaces, precious stones,
628 etc.), then the members of the victim's family group take
vengeance on him personally and kill him. All this naturally
ends in war to the death, or putchi, between the two extended
family groups, an occurrence which is extremely frequent in La

682 Guajira. Hence as "compensation payment for blood" cannot
762 be claimed, from these objects (the tree and the rope), they are
672 punished in default by destruction by fire. This hypothesis is
reinforced, if we remember that to the Guajiro Indian, as well as
● [774] to most primitives, objects — which to us are not alive — are
[778] able to exercise both good and bad influences on the individual
(Cf. "Sickness and Medicine" and "Amulets, Fetishes, Talismans"),
because they possess a spirit — a kind of mana, or immaterial
force, which surrounds and animates everything.

762 Another suggestion that could be made with respect to the
783 destruction of the objects used by a suicide is the following: As
these articles were in direct contact with the dead man, and
particularly with a corpse as dangerous as a suicide is, it is
necessary that they be destroyed so that the contamination